

Hungerstrike

in
West-
Germany



Christa Eckes

End this
18 year long
torture



Karl-Heinz Dellwo

copy and pass on 30p

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To the Situation of Political Prisoners in West Germany and West Berlin

O. Historical Introduction

We try to give an short survey of the situation of political prisoners, more precisely the prisoners from armed groups, and of the repressive system in West Germany. We think that such an exchange of experiences on the development of the conditions of repression throughout Europe and their assimilation (and on the development of resistance) can be illuminating and helpful for the struggle for liberation, which we can only win together.

West Germany as the predominant economic and political power in Europe is especially advanced in building up her repressive system and her repressive techniques (according to her economic hegemony).

In order to better our understanding of this development and the restrictions with which those experiences can be generalized, however, we have to make another two fundamental historical preliminary remarks:

a) the German workers' movement has hardly any tradition of militant struggle. It is paralyzed by the double trauma to have twice missed the chance of necessary armed uprising in its latest history; in 1933, in view of Hitler's seizure of power, the German workers' movement made war upon itself (the German Communist Party (KPD) vs. the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and vice versa). The KPD waited for signals from Moscow instead of arming itself. Subsequently 100,000 communists were liquidated by the Nazis.

The second chance was missed out by the surviving activists of the workers' movement after the end of WWII in 1945 when the old power and repressive system was not only reinstated under the protection of the Western Allies but simply continued its operation.

The KPD trying to take action against state projects like rearmament was simply prohibited in 1956, its members were arrested for high treason and put in gaol.

The rest of the pacification was done by the SPD, the trade unions and through economic bribery, i.e. the so-called German "Wirtschaftswunder" (economic miracle).

b) In West Germany and West Berlin as well as in many other countries in the middle of the sixties the youth uncorrupted by fascism breaking out of the prescribed paths.

The youth was motivated by the model of the liberation struggles waged in the three continents (Africa, Asia and Latin America), the US genocide in Vietnam, the need to explain and overcome their parents' Nazi past and the search for their own cultural and personal liberation. Fields of action of the 68 youth and students' movement were the Vietnam War, the university and education system, the manipulation through the mass media (especially the Springer press, e.g. "Bild", a paper similar to the British "Sun"), recent Nazi tendencies and the law system. Their means were demonstrations, provocations and militant actions.

The revolt was made up of hundreds of thousands of youth going onto the streets without experiences but filled with revolutionary zeal.

However, in the end the connection with the masses and the workers didn't occur.

The state reacted to this revolt on three different levels:

- repression: demonstrators and other militants were thrown into gaol.
- reforms: especially in the education area some overdue reforms were granted.
- integration: well-paid posts in the education or other state institutions were offered to a great number of leaders of the students' movement. At the same time an amnesty was granted for arrested demonstrators.

Karl-Heinz Rath, former chairperson of the Socialist Students' Association (SDS) in Homburg said: "The political class opened itself very widely ranging as far as the right in order to integrate and buy from the stream of the revolt what could be bought in any way. And you have to speak of a bribery encompassing nearly the whole social stratum. The socialdemocratic and liberal government was a giant bribery operation towards the left intelligence. And the left intelligence let itself be bribed in that situation considering the consequences of a continued radical course."

1. The RAF Becomes 'Enemy of State No. 1'

In 1970 Andreas Baader sentenced to three years imprisonment for an arson attack on a department store was freed through force by Ulrike Meinhof and others. At this time the group round Ulrike Meinhof and Andreas Baader was one of many groups in the end of the 60's discussing the way forward to revolution and hereby encountering Latin American concepts of urban guerrilla warfare. The day after the break-out the whole of Berlin was posterized with Ulrike Meinhof's photo headed 'Attempted Murder'. All media took part in the public hunting for the 'Enemy of State No. 1'.

A woman later sentenced for the liberation action commented on this at a later point of time:

"Well, the reaction of the state apparatus to Andreas' liberation was extraordinary despite all our information and perceptions of this state. The reaction of the state was of a kind that the enormous search commencing after the liberation suddenly had an intimidating effect even on those who had got down to the question of illegality and armed struggle."

Gone underground the group round Ulrike Meinhof and Andreas Baader worked out the 'Urban Guerrilla Concept' under the name of Red Army Faction. They stressed their link with the liberation struggles in the three continents (Africa, Asia and Latin America) and opposed the corruption of the left with the need for armed struggle, which can, according to their assessment, be only waged from illegality.

Other armed groups like the Berliner 'Movement 2nd June' or the 'Revolutionary Cells' (RZ) active since 1973 or the women guerrilla group 'Red Zora' originated from the RZ, however, stressed the necessity to operate undercover from legality as long as possible so as to intervene into actual struggles in the community, factories, or into other social focal points by means of urban guerrilla.

In May 1972 the RAF took their first offensive against the US Army, against the publisher Springer and against the legal apparatus. One month later the RAF cadres known by name were arrested.

In the case of Andreas Baader, Jan Carl Raspe and Holger Meins the arrest was shown on TV and repeated for days.

2. Gaol

The modern prison system is fundamentally based on the principle of isolation. The prisoner is torn out of his or her normal way of life so as to better manipulate him or her in controlled isolation and to sever his or her former field of action at the same time.

The utmost importance concerning political prisoners is placed on the measurements to prevent their influence to the outside and on others, to prevent the spread of the revolutionary virus and to cut off the prisoners from information so as to starve them politically.

In addition to the prison isolation in the cell and the separation from other prisoners special care is placed on visits and correspondence right from the beginning. The tendency is that these contacts are stopped whenever the contact is important politically or emotionally.

(As an example we quote from a decision of Celle Prison on 9/1/80: "Regarding: Interception of a postcard of your wife

(...) The intercepted postcard is not a Christmas greeting as declared. Your wife rather asks exclusively for information on visit contacts with the prisoner (Karl-Heinz) Dellwo (a prisoner from the RAF) and facts about the last hunger strike. This fact founds the danger that the correspondence with your wife might have a harmful effect on you. Your reintegration is thereby hampered. A correspondence between you and your wife would be permitted if the contents of the letter were restricted to family matters."

In line with the strategy of 'low intensity warfare' (i.e. Kitsonian methods) the state worked out a special programme outside the prison walls as well so as to oppose the possible spread of the revolutionary virus originating from the armed groups.

Destroying the solidarity. Right from the start it was aimed at undermining potential fields of sympathizers, publicly stigmatizing sympathizers and threatening them with repression (this concerned, besides left groups and individuals, even those who might become sympathizers; in the heydays of repression as in 1972 or 1977 the witch hunting went as far as against middle-class writers such as Heinrich Böll or Luise Rinser).

For this purpose the public media were needed. All West German media without exception played the game every time under the slogan 'OUR State is in danger'.

Through counter-insurgency actions like bomb threats on railway stations, news about the poisoning of drinking water, etc. pursued by the Secret Service the media constructed an image of 'the terrorist', an 'enemy of the people'. Thus they managed to instil in the population a diffuse fear of terror. A broad participation of the population in tracking down 'terrorists' was achieved.

Repression. In addition to the public hunting leftists who did not distance themselves from the guerrilla were (and are) prosecuted by the law. A special paragraph, the paragraph 129a (membership, propaganda and support of a terrorist association) created the pretext for prosecution and arrest under worse conditions if suspect.

This paragraph was (and is) also used to prosecute newspaper makers, printers and distributors of papers which publish or discuss communiques of armed groups.

(Some recent example are a magazine called 'Radikal', a book containing letters written by RAF prisoners edited by the lawyer Pieter Bakker-Schut, the tour poster of the Basque rock group 'Kortatu' which carried the demand 'No extradition of ETA militants' or the Hamburg magazine 'Sabot' which carried a photo of a banner with the slogan 'Placing Together of Political Prisoners'.)

Another law, the paragraph 88a, valid until 1981 put 'Instruction of Crimes' in general under penalty.

Since the 70's the system of the Federal Criminal Authority (Bundeskriminalamt, BKA) has been enlarged in enormous dimensions, especially the computer-supported collection and transfer of data. (in 1971: 1,820 posts and a budget of DM 54.8 million; in 1981: 3,536 officers and employees with a budget of DM 290 million)

Presenting guerrilla fighters as psychopaths. In the case of the RAF the State Defence Authorities drew one more register from the arsenal of counter-insurgency strategists; they tried forcefully to have Ulrike Meinhof's brain examined, who was presented as the intellectual head of the RAF. She was assumed to have an old brain tumor. This brain tumor for months was sensationalized in the bourgeois press and assumptions were made about her changes of personality and intellectual confusions.

Ulrike Meinhof was to be made an example of because in eye of the left public she was still highly respected even after her imprisonment. This was due to her earlier activities in the anti-nuclear movement and her critical work as a journalist.

When the results of the US Army research on brainwashing were put into practice in the high-security wings of the prisons for ethnic minorities and other non-adapted groups, Ulrike Meinhof was locked up in a 'Dead Wing' of the men's mental hospital in Cologne for months; the whole wing of the building was emptied so that she was deprived of any environmental stimuli (sounds, light, i.e. sensory deprivation).

"In order to produce a significant change of a person's behavior and attitudes it is necessary to weaken and undermine the connections with old behavior patterns and to prevent their support. Considering the fact that most of the connections are made up of direct personal affirmation of the former behavior and of the attitudes of such people it is often necessary to destroy these emotional ties. This can either be done by physically isolating the individual and preventing any communication with those who s/he cares for; or by making clear to him/her that those s/he respects are not worth it and that s/he should distrust them actively." Edgar H. Schein: *Man Against Man. Brainwashing. In: Correctional Psychiatry*, No. 8, 1963, pp. 90-97)

In addition to the intended wearing down and psychological destruction the Dead Wing was also an attempt to carry on the systematic examination of the effects total isolation has on the human mind.

The Dead-Wing programme was further used on Astrid Proll, Ronald Augustin, Gudrun Ensslin and Rolf Pohle. (In 1975 Katharina Hammerschmidt died in a Dead Wing due to lack of medical attention.)

The destruction of solidarity and the repression campaigns were partly successful leading to a political isolation of the RAF. However, there was still a left public in the middle of the 70's who fought alongside the lawyers and relatives against the prison conditions of the political prisoners; at least they achieved the movement of some prisoners from the Dead Wing to the Stammheim isolation wing as a group of four being able to visit each other.

Criminalization. The State Defence Authorities tried to criminalize the trusted lawyers chosen by the prisoners themselves, who had been active in such campaigns accusing them of 'Support of a Criminal Association'. That was only successful for some time.

Later a special law was passed, the paragraph 146 StPO (Order of Criminal Procedure) allowing only for one lawyer per trial and accused in connection with armed struggle. After such a trial a lawyer was prohibited to defend another prisoner from a guerrilla group. As a result of this law the number of potential lawyers was drastically reduced.

Prison struggle. The political prisoners themselves tried to change their prison conditions through collective hunger strikes in order to gain the same conditions as other prisoners. The authorities tried to stop the hunger strikes by first withdrawing water; further giving to the public a picture that the political prisoners were so privileged they didn't need a change of their conditions.

In 1974 Holger Meins died on hunger strike. He had to undergo the torture of forced feeding drawing out the length of his dying; at the same time getting only a minimum of calories so that he starved.

For the last time the left and the prison groups were rebelling together and furiously. There were militant demonstrations everywhere, the windows of banks and courts of justice were damaged. In Berlin the Movement 2nd June shot dead van Drenkmann, president of the Supreme Court of Justice, who was responsible for the prison conditions.

Free the guerrilla. The lasting impression of Holger Meins' death and the prison conditions including the Dead Wing all three guerrilla groups active at that time (74/75) were determinedly fighting to withdraw the prisoners from the liquidation interest of the state.

Brigitte Kuhlmann and Wilfried Böse from the Revolutionary Cells cooperating with a Palestinian commando hijacked an Israeli passenger plane to Entebbe/Uganda. Their aim was the release of some political prisoners in Israel and West Germany. The airport was stormed by an Israeli special task force and the hijackers shot dead.

A commando of the RAF occupied the West German embassy in Stockholm by force of arms and explosives. They wanted the release of 26 RAF prisoners. The explosives were detonated - according to commando members - by the Bundesgrenzschutz (Federal Border Defence) through radio ignition; the embassy was stormed. Two commando members died from burnings; one of them, Siegfried Hausner, after transported to West Germany by plane in spite of his perilous condition.

Only an action of the Movement 2nd June was successful. On 27/2/75 members of the 2nd June kidnapped Peter Lorenz, CDU candidate for Lord Mayor in Berlin, and achieved the release of two demonstrators arrested at the Holger-Meins demonstration in Berlin and five members of several armed groups.

By hindsight it was stated that at that time the seed of the distancing campaigns had come up. Among other reasons this might be explained by the fact that the armed groups didn't put forward or took up political aims any more apart from attacks on members and buildings of the legal system.

The Revolutionary Cells were the only exception; due to their structure of independently operating cells they were able to intervene into and push forward social struggles by methods of armed struggle or by sabotage. In the middle of the 70's this took place on a relatively low level; e.g. they reprinted tube and bus tickets and spread them among the population in support of a campaign against price rises. Later, in the end of the 70's and in the 80's this strategic difference to the RAF became clearer with the RZ militantly intervening in the anti-nuclear movement, the movement against the Frankfurt runway West or the campaign against imperialist refugee policy.

On the other hand the hijacking of a passenger plane was not in accordance with revolutionary criteria because it endangered the lives of people not involved. This contributed to a severe loss of sympathy for the guerrilla.

Karl-Heinz Roth said: "I think the people, the exploited classes are watching this point much more sensitively as the revolutionary avantgardes might believe or perceive it. I also think that the population turns away from revolutionary alternatives at the very moment when they don't see the most fundamental distinctive mark any more. And that is, and that's what I meant earlier on by the moral quality of the revolutionary struggle, that is the worth of life."

3. The Trial at Stammheim

In 1975, three years after their arrest, the trial against four prisoners presented as the heads of the RAF started at Stuttgart-Stammheim in a bomb-proof court bunker built especially for this purpose. In the course of this two-year trial Justice and State Defence Authorities once again showed the whole of their arsenal.

First, the trusted lawyers chosen by the prisoners themselves were excluded from defence using the newly created law paragraph 146 StPO (see part 1). At the same time state-chosen lawyers were attributed to the prisoners against their will. It was regulated by other newly created laws that the trial could be led without the prisoners or the trusted lawyers being present.

In connection with so-called bugging affairs - e.g. the then critical manager of a nuclear company Klaus Traube was bugged - it was leaked that talks between accused and advocates in the Stammheim gaol were bugged. The presiding judge systematically tried to prevent all political declarations and arguments. Only at the end of the trial it was leaked that he regularly conferred with the editor-in-chief of the Springer paper "Die Welt".

All prisoners were sentenced to life-long imprisonment following the invented theory that each member of the group were responsible for every action even if the actual participation couldn't be proved.

At the start of the trial experts appointed by the court stated that the capability of the defendants to follow the trial was reduced through the prison conditions. Based on this experience the court psychiatrist Prof. Rasch developed a proposal to place together the prisoners at least in bigger groups capable of interaction comprising 15 to 20 members so as to prevent the worst effects of isolation.

However, since the prison conditions didn't change the RAF prisoners took up the court medical's demand. For the first time in 1977 they no longer demanded conditions equal to all the other prisoners but the free associating ("Zusammenlegung") in groups capable of interaction and additionally a treatment according to the minimal guarantees of the Geneva Convention for POWs. The reason for this was that they saw themselves as part of the world-wide anti-imperialist liberation movements. During the trial one of their lawyers, Klaus Croissant, claimed that violent attacks against the US institutions in West Germany were justified by International Law since the US were waging a brutal war against Vietnam and thus breaking International Law. This motion was turned down by the court.

The demand for applying the Geneva Convention for POWs, however, was criticized by parts of the left for being based on laws made by bourgeois states and for being elitist, i.e. not regarding the struggle of 'social' prisoners. The prisoners from other guerrilla groups, i.e. the Movement 2nd June and the Revolutionary Cells, held on to the demand for equality with all the other prisoners. Once placed under conditions of 'normal imprisonment' they hoped to struggle together with 'social prisoners' against the prison system.

Later, in the 80's the demand for 'normal imprisonment' was dropped by nearly all political prisoners since the prison system itself had changed leaving 'normal imprisonment' as a highly differentiated system in which different groups of prisoners are 'treated' according to their conformity; the high-security wings are now used for all 'unadapted', i.e. fighting prisoners. Today only the free association with each other remains a realistic alternative. In the 70's, however, the prison movement was split on that point.

4. Autumn '77

In 1977 the last attempt to free the RAF prisoners was met by the firm resolution of the then SPD/FDP government not to release any prisoners. The government played for time and first put the parliament out of action. An emergency committee composed of delegates from all parties and the BKA (Federal Criminal Authority) was founded to rule West Germany.

Chancellor Helmut Schmidt asked its members to articulate freely whatever idea or wish came into their minds regarding the kidnapping of the employers' president Schleyer. The proposals first documented by 'Der Spiegel' in Sept. '87 ranged from 'shooting a prisoner every hour' to 'pretending to fly them to Africa and arrest them immediately'.

The media were demanded to do what they were told by the emergency committee; this was accepted without contradiction. They only issued officially authorized news regarding the complex RAF and Schleyer. Therefore a widespread opinion was produced that 'OUR State was under threat'. The atmosphere of those days can hardly be described in words. There was a feeling of living in a fascist state tolerating no contradictions and justifying its own actions solely by 'reasons of state'.

All political prisoners were subject to a total ban on any contacts during the period of the kidnapping also including no contacts with their lawyers, no possession of radios, newspapers, etc. When individual judges tried to lift the regulations made by the State Defence a corresponding law on the ban on contacts legalizing this isolation was passed in a period of 11 days.

On the 17th of October 1977 a unit of the BGS (Federal Border Defence), the so-called GSG 9 (similar to the British SAS), stormed the hijacked plane in Mogadishu, freed the passengers and shot dead the hijackers. The members of the special unit were celebrated as 'Heroes of the Nation', the GSG 9 gained worldwide fame and later trained similar anti-terror units in other countries.

The morning after the Stammheim prisoners, Andreas Baader and Jan-Carl Raspe were found shot dead in their cells and Gudrun Ensslin hanged. The politicians of the emergency committee hoped that the problem of the RAF was finally solved.

The West German press didn't put forward any doubts regarding the state version of the prisoners' suicides even before any results of the post-mortem examination were issued. The post-mortem examination and the investigations were made so sloppily in parts that some traces just disappeared in the course of the examination. There were such absurdities in the official statements suggesting the conclusion - not regarding the political motivation - that the prisoners were killed in an operation of the Secret Service. However, ten years past both versions can't be verified conclusively though the suicide version is highly unlikely.

5. The Programme for Building New High-Security Wings (Trakte)

After the autumn of '77 high-security wings resembling the Stammheim model were built for the prisoners from the RAF and the Movement 2nd June in Celle, Lüneburg and Berlin-Moabit. In Berlin in 1980 when the new wing was going to be used a broad and partly militant resistance raised against this 'mausoleum with the comfort of a tube station at 4.30 a.m.', said Prof. Rasch.

Unnoticed by the broad public high-security wings - all called by different names - were built in nearly all gaols for other groups of prisoners. The prisoners concerned were and still are drug addicts going to be reeducated and prisoners not yet accepting the prison regime who either attempted to break out or to rebel in gaol. The high-security wing experimented with using prisoners from the guerrilla, unaware to the public became a normal element of the modern prison system characterized by highly differentiated penalty methods adapted to different groups of prisoners. Those who comply are allowed to rise on the ladder up to 'Open Prisons' consisting of work outside the prison and sleeping in gaol. The others are locked up in their cells, the rebellious prisoners in the high-security wings.

Therefore the high-security wing is a necessary condition for the functioning of the differentiated reform penalty system. A further condition is the splitting up of the prisoners in small groups easy to supervise by psychologists and social workers.

The modern gaol - e.g. the new women prison in Berlin-Plötzensee mainly used for drug prisoners - exclusively consists of closed units with 10 to 15 prisoners. Each of them is awarded different privileges according to their charges and conduct. In Berlin-Plötzensee the women prisoners went on hunger strike for four weeks in September '87 against this type of a psychologically refined penalty system.

Though the interests of political and 'social' prisoners coincide with the question of the high-security wings only the prisoners from the Movement 2nd June managed to wage a joint struggle with 'social' prisoners. In Berlin-Moabit they helped to organize hunger strikes in '79, '80 and '81 demanding the opening of the cell doors over the days and free communication. In Bielefeld Klaus Viehmann in a common struggle with 'social' prisoners achieved the temporary closure of the high-security wing and their transferal to 'normal' wings in other prisons.

The prisoners from the RAF still demanded their placing together in bigger groups. Since '84 most prisoners from the resistance have followed this demand.

6. The Present Situation

At present the following members from guerrilla or resistance groups are imprisoned:

three prisoners from the Movement 2nd June (Ralf Reinders and Ronald Fritsch in Berlin-Moabit, Klaus Viehmann in Bielefeld); the two prisoners from the Revolutionary Cells have been released;

in December '87 two women, Ingrid Strobl and Ulla Penselin were imprisoned for allegations of being members of the Revolutionary Cells resp. the Red Zora. While Ulla Penselin was released in September '88 - the only piece of proof was on alleged conspiratorial meeting preparing incendiary attacks on stores of the Adler textile company, which turned out to be an editorial meeting of a magazine critical towards genetic technology - Ingrid Strobl is still in gaol. She is accused of having bought an alarm clock that had been marked by the BKA. The same alarm clock is supposed to have been used in a bomb attack against the Lufthansa administration department in Cologne in '86 in protest against Luftansa's involvement in deporting refugees and sex tourism. Since Ingrid Strobl claims to have given this alarm clock to an acquaintance whom she is not willing to name for reasons of not exposing anybody to the brutal machinery of repression she is imprisoned in order to force a statement from her. Her trial started on the 14th of February 1989.

So far no activists from the Red Zora were caught;

from the movement against the Frankfurt Runway 18 West two activists (Andreas Eichler and Frank Hoffmann) are in gaol for allegedly having shot dead two policemen during a demonstration on the 2nd of November 1987; another two Frankfurt activists (Rainer Hübner and Andreas Semisch) allegedly for acts of sabotage against the nuclear industry like e.g. the sawing down of electricity pylons. The trial against those four and five other activists started on the 23rd of February 1989;

more than 30 prisoners from anti-imperialist or autonomous resistance groups under the theory invented by the State Prosecution (BAW) of being members or supporting the RAF; this includes cases like the one of Uli Winterhalter who was arrested in September '88 for possession of a narcotic drug; the BAW claims that the same drug was used by the French Action Directe though it is regularly sent to Palestine by medical aid organisations;

more than 40 prisoners from the RAF; about 10 prisoners who do no longer belong to the collective of the RAF prisoners either being excluded by the collective or having distanced themselves;

all in all about 100 prisoners on political charges.

For all the prisoners from the Movement 2nd June who are not part of the collective any more supporting the concept of urban guerrilla there are - though partly only after many years - fairly 'normal' prison conditions including the possibility to meet other prisoners. Some of them are in 'Open Prisons', for others there are still special restrictions and controls in 'Normal Prisons' - depending on their supposed dangerousness, i.e. how close they still are ideologically to the concept of urban guerrilla or how prepared they are to cooperate with the prison authorities.

Amongst the rest of the prisoners there are only three mini groups of three prisoners each in Celle and Lüneburg and two in Berlin-Plötzensee. All the others are in solitary confinement; even if several prisoners are in the same gaol they are not allowed to meet.

Instead of this they are offered to have a joint walk in the prison yard with individual prisoners selected by the prison authorities (in some cases those other prisoners were racists or neofascists); partly with all prisoners of a single wing. All the prisoners from the RAF refuse these offers and insist on first being able to meet other political prisoners from the same prison. Several prisoners from the RAF do not do any walk in the prison yard any more for this reason.

The prison conditions for all prisoners have got worse exceeding the degree known so far: the receiving of printed matters was rendered even more difficult; the censorship of correspondence regarding political information or discussion was made stricter; e.g. a letter was intercepted supporting the demand for an urgent operation of Angelika Goder, a prisoner from the RAF, without control by the police sitting beside the hospital bed.

Lawyer Thomas Herzog commented that the general aim of the treatment of political prisoners is "to intensify the isolation of the prisoners from each other and from the outside, to cut them off from their political contacts and from the development outside the prison, not to let any of their political ideas and thoughts, their struggle, their life pass through the prison walls and not to let them notice any trace of effect their political activities have."

7. "Dialogue with the Society"

In October 1987, ten years after the 'German Autumn', the Green Party Member and MP Antje Vollmer, the writer Martin Walser and the theologist Ernst Käsemann launched a campaign for a 'dialogue with the society', a dialogue between political prisoners and prominent personalities, 'representatives' of the society. In their letter they claimed that the confrontation between the urban guerrilla as part of the solidarity movement with anti-imperialist liberation movements and the state were historically outdated since the political relations had changed. In order to 'solve' the 'problem of terrorism' both sides should 'reconciliate', then the state could show 'mercy' and grant an amnesty.

The first reactions of the prisoners from the RAF were cautious but not totally refusing. RAF prisoner Adelheid Schulz wrote: "The conditions under which a 'dialogue with the society' had made sense for us would have been to create minimal conditions: i.e. that we are all part of it, that we are thus able to talk. Everybody who really wants to have a discussion with us knows that isolation - partly for 16 years -, separations from each other and ban on communication through censorship are not a base for a dialogue." Without freely associating with each other in larger groups and free communication this dialogue could be only an attempt by the state to move ex-guerrilla prisoners to dissociate themselves from the concept of urban guerrilla and from the collective of the RAF prisoners. These conditions were not granted and the RAF prisoners refused the 'dialogue'.

And, as Antje Vollmer admitted, she had never thought of a dialogue with the 'hard-liners' but with the dissociated prisoners and the future dissociating prisoners. RAF prisoner Lutz Tauber commented this: "What they have in mind is not a dialogue with an open ending but to undermine all forms of resistance, if armed or unarmed."

The firm supporters of law and order, however, were and are not prepared to talk about an amnesty even for prisoners who abjure. The only exceptions remain the RAF associates Klaus Jünschke and Manfred Grashof who were released in 1988 resp. 1989, now propagating non-violence and condemning the politics of the RAF on moral grounds.

8. Hunger Strikes for Free Association

On the 1st of February 1989 the 10th hungerstrike of prisoners from the RAF commenced. In the following we give a short survey of the precedent nine hunger strikes:

17/1 - 16/2/1973: 40 political prisoners went on the first organized hunger strike to protest against special treatment and isolation. From 9/2 to 13/2 Andreas Baader was deprived of drinking water.

8/5 - 29/6/1973: 80 political prisoners went on the second hunger strike to achieve equal conditions like other prisoners and free political information. For the first time force feeding was applied. After Carmen Roll's and Siegfried Hausner's isolation had been lifted the hunger strike was broken off.

13/9/1974: the third hunger strike of 40 prisoners started. On 9/11/1974 Holger Meins died after 50 days on hunger strike in the Wittlich prison. The day before the artificial feeding had been interrupted and the medical in charge had gone on holidays for the weekend. Several hours before his death Holger Meins' lawyers had demanded from the judge in charge to transfer Holger Meins to a hospital, which had been refused. On 17/12/1974 the hunger strikers dropped their demand for equality with all the other prisoners and demanded the free association of all political prisoners in a single prison and the lifting of the isolation. On 5/2/1975 the hunger strike was broken off after 145 days. As a result the RAF prisoners were allowed to meet each other for one hour every day and to have a common recreational hour.

29/3 - 30/4/1977: the fourth hunger strike of about 50 prisoners started. On 8/4 the Stammheim accused went on a thirst strike, which was joined by 36 prisoners in several prisons. After the prison medicals' refusal to execute further forced feedings the ministry of justice told the prisoners in a binding document that a certain concentration of prisoners were going to be implemented in Stammheim prison. Following this the hunger strikers terminated their protest. The ministry's promise was partly fulfilled in June but revoked in August.

8/8/1977: a 'raiding squad' attacked the isolated political prisoners in Stammheim. The fifth hunger strike started, which was interrupted on 2/9 because, according to the hunger strikers, no movement were possible; and after the federal prosecutor Buback and the banker Ponto had been shot dead it were to be feared that they were to be made an example of.

Morch/April 1978: the sixth hungerstrike against individual and mini group isolation took place.

20/4 - 26/6/1979: between 47 and over 70 prisoners took part in the seventh hunger strike, which ended without results.

2/2 - 16/4/1981: over 100 political prisoners took part in the eighth hunger strike, for the first time prisoners from the 'anti-imperialist resistance' as well. They demanded to be able to freely associate under conditions capable of interaction and the release of Günter Sonnenberg. After the Home Secretary promised that no prisoner were to remain in solitary isolation the strike was broken off on 16/4. On the same day Sigrud Debus forced since 16/3 died under dubious circumstances after several days of unconsciousness. His lawyer wrote that the force feeding had effected his death. The promises were not held by the federal government.

4/12/1984 - 1/2/1985: 40 political prisoners took part in the ninth hungerstrike. They demanded an improvement of their prison conditions. For several reasons a number of prisoners didn't follow the strike. Several people were in a serious condition under the risk of their lives. Knut Folkerts and Lutz Tauber had to be transferred to the intensive care ward of the university hospital in Hannover.

1/2/1989: about 47 political prisoners from the RAF and from anti-imperialist resistance groups went on hunger strike demanding to be able to freely associate and communicate and the release of prisoners who are seriously ill. Several 'social' prisoners went on a solidarity hunger strike. On 14/2/1989 all but two hunger strikers interrupted their fast; every two weeks the hunger strike will be rejoined by two prisoners each. So far the State Prosecutor has reacted by charging the hunger strikers and their lawyers with 'membership in a terrorist association' because they had been able to coordinate the strike.

Communique of the Hunger Striking Prisoners from the RAF and Resistance Groups issued on February 1st 1989

"From today on we are on hunger strike.

Now we are not going to let go any more, the free association with each other must be achieved now.

Everybody who wants to know does know what isolation means, it is understood internationally and defined as torture.

In this country they have made isolation a rule for imprisoned revolutionaries from the guerrilla, from the resistance or for foreign comrades, and they are using it against fighting social prisoners - internationally it is more and more taken over as the clean and mean method of the refined West German Europeans.

It has to be broken in this country.

We have made nine hunger strikes, two prisoners died on them, the health of a lot of us is damaged.

Now there has to be an end to this eighteen years of torture. That's our definite decision, so we will fight.

There is not much more to be explained. Our situation and our demands are clear. By this time everything within us strives against talking about isolation and about our wish to be together. These dry words and their repetition already are scorn on the reality in the prisons. In the course of the strike we intend to say something else from time to time, now only a few major things what it is about for us.

We will not go on like this.

From the beginning the aim of the isolation was to destroy the prisoners, to suffocate the politics of the RAF. With that they failed because of us - but neither can we take it any more. We do not want to bear it, that's it. That is our political and existential decision now. For even if we could bear up against their destructive machinery and if we gained something decisively new for us even in this situation - there is a limit to which the permanent struggle of the individuals is not possible any more as well as the way of life that is permanently reduced for an imprisoned political group. That limit is now here.

It was only possible for a limited time, which can be seen through the cycles of the hunger strikes throughout all those years. Through those hunger strikes we defended our identity in struggle and made alive for us the collectivity in the isolation once again.

That was so as long as the strength we had brought from our struggle into our holes was exhausted once again.

Now we do not only add another strike any more, that is not possible; now there is only the material aim for us.

Now we want the free association with each other; and by that we also want to put an end to this long phase - and then we want to go further.

We will not accept the foreseeable reaction which they will call 'The Isolation Is Lifted', i.e. a facade, single differentiated adaptations which don't change anything fundamentally for us and which are supposed to keep off from the West German state the attacks because of the isolation. Not after this length of time. This should be clear from the beginning. We always used every little change, we were always prepared for new steps. Now there is nothing else but our free association with each other.

It is an illusion to believe that our struggle of coming together could be undermined by a new presentation that might then be called 'Normal Imprisonment'; that would only mean another round for us. There is nothing more but our freely associating with each other.

It is not the old story - the need against isolation and the possibility of a counterstructure under these conditions - nothing remains the same in this furnace. For us the demand has got a further ranging material character at this point. We have got through this period only through the relationships with each other and the permanent lively development - and thereby our bond has become part of us like arms and legs.

Nobody can take it away from us, nobody can turn it back. It is something material created by the struggle against annihilation - and now the same story put simply that way: it is the dialectical product of their measurements. That's the position we now stand on after eighteen years of isolation and its modifications. No 'normality' could have been executed by the state. They will have to swallow the toad which our freely associating with each other means to them.

But not only subjectively, also related to the political development it is about more. In reality our situation and thereby our possibilities on the one hand - and what the actual situation as a whole demands for going further on the other hand have fallen apart.

While we don't have the freedom of associating with each other the question of a further political perspective for the political prisoners on the whole is already developing.

The crux of the question is us; all sides want something from us - but we cannot talk with each other and hardly act.

It only works for us when we talk as a collective and without us it does not work. That should have become clear regarding the many attempts over the recent years to omit us. Now we want to take part in the whole political discussion.

That is the other side of our demand for freely associating with each other.

New questions have arisen from a couple of developments, in this country and internationally. It has become a new stage of the struggle in which aims, formulations of policies and formations for struggle are being approached anew, everywhere, on both sides.

That as well is a reflexion of the fact that in this country the question of the prisoners has come up from both directions. The state grants individual amnesties; groups conformist to the state desire a total amnesty - and the revolutionary resistance takes up again that the political prisoners' freedom has to be fought for.

We, too, think that this debate is ripe now. But that will only be taken forward in a process of discussion and practise, in which revolutionary politics becomes a new real factor in this country.

Our struggle for free association with each other must be part of it now. We consider it possible a new unity in the revolutionary struggle regarding the many attempts in the last year and the openness and the will throughout different parts of the resistance. Now it already stands out a reversal of the left redevelopment since the end of the 70's; the struggle in the metropole is able to reach the stage of the international struggle in a new way as well. Then totally new political perspectives in West Germany will be opened.

We hope that.

Our free association with each other is the first thing for us now.

Then we want the discussion; on the entire situation - and for our freedom. For us that's our aim in the end.

Since freedom, of course, is our aim. We do not want to establish a piece of political organisation in goal; a counterstructure as prisoners really is not our ultimate happiness.

Considering everything we regard it possible to take that up as a realistic aim. As far as that we agree. Regarding the further steps, the way to make them concrete, we have to be together.

We determined the free association with each other as a stage of transition.

We take up a new kind of collective struggle now.

They have made a new law during the last hunger strike with which they tried to take the means of hunger strike away from us, the 'law of coma'.

It means that the individual lying in coma in a long-extended medical-technical manipulation in the intensive-care ward is to be deprived of his or her will and ability to decide whether or not to continue the struggle. It further means regarding the struggle as a whole that they try to reduce the time of decision to a narrow period, practically to a point; the point when after two or three months a lot of us are standing on the brink at the same time. Several might die then but in a short, harsh confrontation - which they 'bear and carry well' as they have said last time; and then they think it is over.

And that would also mean that the means of struggle turned against us politically. Then with this culmination for all, at the same point of time the question of sense and aim would come back to us. If many are dead, how do the others want to be together then?

We will turn it round on them and wage a protracted struggle.

Each of us is the collective.

we all start together, after two weeks we pass over into a chain. Apart from two all interrupt, after two weeks the next join it again, after the next two weeks another two, and so on.

We do not let loose until we have got our demands.

We demand:

- * free association with each other of all prisoners from guerrilla and resistance in one or two large groups, in which new prisoners are integrated, with access to the common prison yards.

- * free association with each other of all prisoners fighting for it.

- * release of the prisoners whose health has been destroyed by sickness or torture through isolation and whose reconvalescence is excluded under prison conditions.

- * release of Günter Sonnenberg, Claudia Wannersdorfer, Bernd Rössner and Angelika Gorder.

- * free medical treatment for all prisoners without control by the state defence.

- * free political information and communication of the prisoners with all groups of the society.

For the prisoners from the RAF

Helmut Pohl

1/2/89

These seven women and two men are
on hunger-strike at the moment:

since February 1st:
Karl-Heinz Dellwo
Christa Eckes

since March 1st:
Rolf Heissler
Gabi Rollnik

since March 15th
Brigitte Monhaupt
Heidi Schulz

since March 29th
Irmgard Moeller
Ingrid Barabass
Hanna Krabbe